Supporting Parents to ensure all Wisconsin Children Thrive

LISTENING SESSIONS FOR PARENTS FINAL REPORT

PREPARED FOR THE WISCONSIN CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PREVENTION BOARD

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Jump at the Sun CONSULTANTS, LLC

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This report was developed by Lorraine Lathen in collaboration with moderators, notetakers, administrative support and a graphic designer, who all dream of a world of **hope, tolerance** and **social justice**, where everyone lives in dignity and has an equal opportunity to achieve optimal health.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In April 2021, the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board contracted with Jump at the Sun Consultants, LLC (JATSC), a woman-owned, minority firm, to conduct qualitative research with parents. In support of Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board's commitment to mobilizing research and practices that prevent the occurrence of child maltreatment, JATSC conducted eleven parent listening sessions. The purpose of these sessions was to learn from parents about the support, resources, services and programs needed to ensure that all Wisconsin children thrive and grow up in safe, stable and nurturing families and communities. Sixty-four parents from across the state of Wisconsin participated in these listening sessions.

JATSC designed a discussion guide to assess parent needs and concerns. The sessions were structured to gain valuable information that parents felt would support them in parenting. The sessions were facilitated virtually using Zoom technology. They typically lasted 90 minutes to two hours. Parents received a $50.00 gift card for participating in the session.

The majority of participants were mothers, although a handful of fathers also participated in the sessions. Participants represented diverse racial and ethnic groups. One session was moderated in Spanish and another session was held with parents of LGBTQ+ youth or parents who identified as LGBTQ+. All sessions were moderated and/or included notetakers that reflected the racial, ethnic and gender spectrum of the participants.

The top ten key findings and recommendations are listed in the Executive Summary. The full report provides a detailed description of the findings and recommendations that are specific to the audience of parents that participated in these sessions.

Key Findings

1. **Parents are struggling** to navigate systems and policies that are meant to help them, especially parents of special needs children, single parents and Native American parents that leave the reservation to travel to the city in search of better employment and housing.

2. **Trusted and affordable** quality child care and housing are needed. The absence of this is stressful to parents and families.

3. **Meeting the basic needs** for the family prevents parents from being present in the lives of their children and functioning as nurturing, loving, engaged parents.

4. There are **critical mental health services** gaps that need to be addressed.

5. **Addiction support** for individuals and families is needed.

6. Parents across the state **worry about the safety of children**, bullying and the lack of programming for teens, especially non-sports related programming.

7. **Historical Trauma, addiction and mistrust** are impacting the wellbeing of Native American families, while racism, discrimination, and injustice are a major concerns among all groups.

8. **Intentionality is needed** to address the diverse needs of LGBTQ+ children's and families.

9. There is a **critical lack** of resources and service options for parents in rural WI.

10. **Bilingual (Spanish/English) programs and services are critically needed** to increase access and help bridge the communication/cultural gap between parents and children.

Recommendations

1. **Increase caseworkers** to support families through a trauma informed care lens.

2. **Provide more programming and services** for parents to connect, especially those from historically disenfranchised groups.

3. **Offer co-parents education to improve communication and resources** to communicate with kids around mental illness and addiction issues.

4. **Invest in proven public safety prevention** instead of more police (improving public infrastructure; funding community education campaigns in anti-bullying and pedestrian safety, yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks).

5. **Train police in trauma-informed approaches** and in community policing practices.

6. **Focus funding on primary prevention strategies** including policy and systems change efforts to dismantle barriers hurting LGBTQ+ families.

7. **Make trauma informed behavioral health care accessible** to children, parents and families.

8. Existing public systems including childcare, schools, health care must each **undergo careful audit and reform to become LGBTQ+ inclusive.**

9. **Improve coordination of services across systems and districts (state, county, tribal)** to meet the needs of Native American children and families.

10. **Fund programs to promote improved race relations and racial healing.** The Jacob Blake shooting, Joseph Rosenbaum killing and George Floyd killing have profoundly impacted WI's children and families.

PART I:

REGIONAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Facilitated Listening Sessions

Northern
- Taylor County
- Wood County

Southeastern
- Milwaukee County
- Racine County
- Kenosha County
- Walworth County

Northeastern
- Brown County
- Calumet County
- Outagamie County
- Shawano County

Southern
- Rock County

Western
- Polk County
- St. Croix County
- Burnett County

Statewide
- Native Americans
- Hispanic/Latin(o)
- LGBTQ+
- African Americans*

**Integrated into other sessions*

NORTHERN REGION AND SOUTHEASTERN WI

WOOD, TAYLOR AND MILWAUKEE COUNTIES

Demographics

This session consisted of six participants: three single mothers from Milwaukee County, two mothers from Wood County and one mother from Taylor County. Two parents were Black, one Latina and three were White. The average number of children is two, ranging in ages six months to 16 years-of-age. One parent was the mother of a biracial child and one was the parent of a special needs daughter.

Key Findings

Parents identified increased stressors living through the pandemic. They expressed the primary role of parents as providers of basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, etc.) and unconditional love and nurturing. This group emphasized the unique needs of parents of children with special needs and challenges of co-parenting.

Living through a pandemic has increased stress on parents.

"My daughter's only two... Especially with COVID, not being able to go anywhere, how do I get any social interaction for her to learn? She hasn't been with anybody... I'm a stay-at-home mom, too, so I don't even get out that much right now."

– Mother of one, Taylor County

"I think [lack of social connectedness] is a stressor that all parents are feeling right now... [The pandemic] is something that our family has taken really seriously."

– Mother of two and several foster children, Wood County

Parents understand their role as a provider of basic needs and emotional support.

"At some points in my life, I felt very inadequate as a provider. I was a very young mom, and I was a single mom and things were very difficult. I felt like he didn't have the same things or the same experiences as other kids. I think that's when I developed a higher level of nurturing because that's something I could do."

– Mother of two and several foster children, Wood County

"The thing that makes a nurturing parent is compassion and understanding..you have to be there for the good and the bad, encouraging positive behaviors and also being supportive of the not so great behaviors."

– Mother of two and several foster children, Wood County

"When they do good things, you show them how much you appreciate them and reward them as well... And spending that quality time with your children."

– Single mother of three, Milwaukee County

Parents of children with special needs and children aging out of foster care require specialized support.

"When my daughter was born, she had a brain injury, so I had to adjust my parenting style, and I had to adjust the way that I had to approach those very basic parenting skills that I had developed and I thought I had mastered into a way that she was going to be receptive. Protecting her and even basic needs looked very different for her than they did for my son. Nurturing her can look very different because she has sensory needs, so there's not always snuggles or giving all those hugs."

– Mother of two and several foster children, Wood County

"There needs to be more resources for children aging out of foster care. They either go back home to what is not a good situation or have to figure things on their own, like their basic needs, housing, employment, and food."

– Mother of two, former foster mother, Wood County

Co-parenting and raising children in blended families complicates parenting.

"My two oldest children, me and their father, were not in the same home. My rules are my rules, so when my kids don't agree with what I'm saying, they will go to their father. When I put them on punishment, they try to talk to their dad to get them off punishment."

– Single mother of three, Milwaukee County

"Communication! My first child is from a previous relationship, and my second is from my husband. For a long time, there was a lot of poor communication between Dad and I, and that maybe was due to our own feelings. It took some growth on both of our sides. [Regarding discipline] we got on the same page that I would actually talk to him first, 'Hey, this is what happened. This is how I'd like to address it. What are your thoughts?' Then all three of us would bring it back to my son together. It was a really effective way of doing it."

– Mother of two and several foster children, Wood County

Some parents feel supported by specific local resources and programs, while other parents experience barriers to accessing services.

WOOD

As a mother of two and several foster children, the participant from Wood County provided rich information on resources, programs and services needed in Wood County to support parents in raising children in **safe, stable and nurturing communities and families.**

- “Headstart provides birth to 3 services and free childcare for qualifying families. Boys and Girls Club-hands-on wrap around services.”

- "The Family Resource Center and the Resilience Center at Marshfield Clinic Child Advocacy Center, provides service for foster care families and any children who might have trauma, whether that’s a result of child abuse, child neglect or poor family relationships."

- “Our local health department provides services outside of WIC and outside of Food Share, like providing parents with diapers. They help with the less traditional stuff, so that’s a really good thing about our health department.”

- “Some of the county programs, there’s sometimes long waitlists because there’s so many people in need, and we’re a rural community. There’s only so many services available.”

- “There’s a lot of paperwork... Some of these parents are coming out of incarceration or they’re in treatment for substance use disorder... You hand them a packet of information, and that is a lot. I’d love to see a more streamlined way to access these services, even if they’re separate entities.”

- "Programs are needed for children at risk because of parents with substance use disorder. We had a grant-funded program that took care of these kids, but the funding ended and there is a great deal of concern that these kids might end up having substance use issues, like their parents."

- Parents from Wood County also mentioned the Family Health Center which is a Federally Qualified Health Center that provides dental services, family health care services, substance abuse services, even for pregnant women. They thought these services were extremely unique and not found in many other parts of the state.

Some parents feel supported by specific local resources and programs, while other parents experience barriers to accessing services.

MILWAUKEE

Milwaukee moms mentioned a plethora of services and programs that support new moms, such as the Women’s Center, Care Net, and the Strong Baby Sanctuary. One Milwaukee mother mentioned that she receives diapers, clothes and baby supplies for attending parenting classes and that although her son is only 6 months old, she has enough clothes from these programs that will last until he’s two years old. Parents from Wood County were stunned.

> “The resources aren’t like that in our region. That is so awesome! Rural communities totally need this. We only have a Facebook parent group for Taylor, Wood, Marathon and Portage counties where we giveaway baby clothes, Easter baskets and supplies that our children don’t need.”
>
> **– Mother of two and several foster children**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Northern and Southeastern Region

The most significant recommendation gleaned from this group was the need to increase support and services for children, parents and families. Participants from the Northern and Southeastern region recommended increasing the quantity and accessibility of caseworkers and the availability of co-parenting programs and services. The Abiding Care Center in Taylor County was lifted up as a quality provider of parenting classes, programs and services that should be considered for replication or expansion to other parts of the region.

1. Increase caseworkers to support children, parents and families.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Living through a pandemic has increased stress on parents.
- Parents of children with special needs and children aging out of foster care require specialized support.
- Some parents feel supported by some specific local resources and programs, while other parents experience wait lists and other barriers to accessing services.
- A streamlined process for accessing services was recommended by a participant and supported by most participants.

2. Offer co-parents education to improve communication, especially around discipline alignment.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Co-parenting with a parent in a different home and a blended family complicates parenting.

SOUTHERN REGION

ROCK COUNTY

Demographics

Although six participants were confirmed for this group, three from Rock County and three from Vernon County, only the three from Rock County participated in the listening session.The three confirmed participants that missed the session are single parents. This might reflect the challenges of juggling the responsibilities of single parenthood and other head of household responsibilities. One of the participants was a single parent, and the average number of children was 2, ranging in age from six years-old to twelve-years-old. Two parents were Black and one was Asian American.

Key Findings

Similar to other groups, mothers expressed stressors related to having to manage everything. Modeling self-efficacy was discussed and integrating the realities of race and racism surfaced as an important responsibility for parents from historically disenfranchised groups. Co-parenting was also mentioned as a challenge. Women of color voiced the need for opportunities to connect with mothers from their communities. Parents shared thoughts on the role of governmental service agencies in supporting Wisconsin parents in raising their children in **safe**, **stable** and **nurturing** families and communities.

Mothers feel pressure to manage entire household.

"Society puts so much expectation on moms to be selfless and give up other things, and I personally don't agree with that. My principle is happy mom and then happy kids and happy family."

– Mother of one, Rock County

"Everyone else in my family gets to take their head off... But I have my stuff, I have [my husband's] stuff, I have the kids' stuff."

– Mother of two, Rock County

Parents can model self-advocacy to teach their children to be strong.

"As a minority, sometimes I have to fight... The typical stereotype about Asian women is that they're compliant, silent, and they will never have any problem with any agreement or arrangement. I want to speak up. My colleague made a comment: 'You're being pretty bold,' and I said, yeah, actually, I am always [bold]... I don't like being taken advantage of, and I don't like when things are unfair. I want that justice. Being a mom, I'm not just doing it for me, I'm also doing it for my kid."

– Mother of one, Rock County

"The Beloit School District wanted to sanitize the look of the district, so they were eliminating the teen pregnancy program I managed... Long story short, I decided to run for school board... I ran the campaign, and I won. My kid saw – You don't bother anyone, but you don't let anyone bother you either."

– Mother of two, Rock County

Parenting is grounded in a deep understanding of race and racism for parents from historically disenfranchised groups.

"In raising black children, I know I have to go above and beyond, so that my babies can have a shot. It's not good enough to just be average, just bump through life. There's a certain level of intentionality and purpose that I have to instill in them at a very young age and continue to drive that message until they leave my home and beyond."

– Mother of two, Rock County

"As Asian American, I know my kid is going to experience lots of things like social and racism, etc. We're highly targeted lately. There are a lot of anti-Asian hate crimes lately because of COVID."

– Mother of one, Rock County

Co-parenting and/or being a single parent complicates parenting.

"My son knows who his dad is, but he sees him very rarely... It's sporadic... I will not bring it up until I know it's going to happen... My mom keeps [my son] for me when I'm at work."

– Mother of one, Rock County

"My father died when I was seven, and my father was my whole world. I cannot imagine parenting by myself because there are days when kids will take it out of you. I just tell them, 'Mommy's all out of tools. I'd love to have this conversation with you, but I don't have any tools left. Let's get the necessities out of the way, get you into bed, and start this cycle over tomorrow cause mama has nothing left.' There are days when my husband comes home from work, and I'm like, 'Tag, you're it!'... To not have that person to be like, 'Tag, you're it?' My mental health would not be as good as it is because parenting is a lot. It is HARD."

– Mother of two, Rock County

Women of color want opportunities to connect with other mothers of color in their communities.

"Most major cities will have a chapter [of Mocha Moms]... It's women of color, so it's so much stuff you don't have to explain, like, how do we find the black pediatrician? Making those connections. That was a critical support system for me."

– Mother of two, Rock County

"I'm Chinese, so I [looked for] a Chinese American moms group or Asian moms. There's some online, but they're too big. As a new person, I don't know where to start [to find a local group]."

– Mother of one, Rock County

Parents have ideas for how governmental services could support families.

"What we're doing now for moms to connect with each other and have deeper conversations... to help me reflect on my parenting practices... I wish things like that could happen for other moms."

– Mother of one, Rock County

"If there was an organization that planned fun family experiences [like we do in the Scouts]... I would be on board... Patterned off a travel agent... If the state could supplement that somehow."

– Mother of two, Rock County

RECOMMENDATIONS

Southern Region

Reflective of the goal to support parents in raising children in safe, supportive and nurturing families and environments, Rock County participants offered three recommendations to be adopted at the child, parent and family levels.

1. Invest in programming modeled after successful organizations.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Parents have ideas for how governmental services could support families.
- Women of color want opportunities to connect with other women of color in their communities.
- Participants discussed aspects of the Scouts they loved (family trips and experiences). They talked about a national grassroots organization called Mocha Moms. Two of the participants RAVED about the Beloit Junior Golf Association's Mr. Quillen's golf program, which is free.

2. Provide more opportunities for parents to connect, especially those from historically disenfranchised groups.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Mothers feel pressure to manage entire household.
- Parenting is grounded in a deep understanding of race and racism for parents from historically disenfranchised groups.
- Parents have ideas for how governmental services could support families.
- Women of color want opportunities to connect to mothers from their communities.

Participants described a need to disconnect from family obligations and enjoy themselves, as well as a need to connect on a deeper level with other moms, especially those from their ethnic/racial backgrounds.

3. Offer single parents additional services.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Co-parenting with a parent in a different home and/or being a single parent complicates parenting.

WESTERN REGION

POLK, ST. CROIX AND BURNETT COUNTIES

Demographics

This session consisted of three participants, one each from Polk, St. Croix and Burnett County. All three parents were White. One participant is a mother of two biracial children. The average number of children was 3.3, ranging from age four months to 13 years of age. It's important to recognize the potential impact of the Western Region's geographic proximity to Minneapolis, relative to trauma and parenting of Black, biracial and or children of color. The murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers ignited a global protest against racially motivated police brutality and a call to defund the police and likely took an emotional toll on communities in Western Wisconsin that were closer in geographic proximity to the protesting and civil unrest.

Key Findings

Parents with traumatic childhoods focus on healing as they raise their children.

"I enjoy parenting more with my second kid. I did a lot of work [on myself] and a lot of reading. I had to put a lot of work into what kind of model I was going to follow and not resent so many things... The enjoyment has taught me to enjoy and love my first kid, too, just relaxing into the role and finding a lot more joy in it."

– Mother of two, Polk County

"It's important that I'm not acting from a place of my emotions and that I'm being very consistent as a parent... The opposite was modeled for me, so I know what the lack of consistent parenting was modeled for me... There's a lot of work to be done in breaking family patterns. It's a never-ending journey."

– Mother of four, Burnett County

Co-parenting with a parent in a different home complicates parenting.

"We have a yours, mine, and ours household, so we co-parent with a couple extra parents. I think that it can be good, and it can really go wrong. There are good days and bad days, and patience definitely comes into play here, too. In both of our ex relationships, mental health is very significant, which also plays a role - and addiction – there's definitely good days and bad days, so to navigate and keep the kiddos safe during those times. That's where communication is key."

– Mother of three, Polk County

"I have two different dads for both my children, and it is very difficult. I find it very important that we work with each other instead of being enemies. One of our biggest goals out of our relationships is to not show our kids that we hate each other and that we're willing to work together for them."

– Mother of two, La Crosse County

Western Wisconsin communities need to prioritize addressing race relations, given their proximity to Minneapolis (where Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd).

"Two of my kiddos identify as Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) children – in our house we say caramel. We've had numerous conversations about protecting them and knowing what to do and not to do. It definitely does scare me and makes me concerned about how to best protect my children, even in rural Wisconsin. Do I think they're going to get shot in my yard? No, not necessarily, we live in the middle of the country, but still, it makes me concerned when we go to a park. I get concerned when we go up to the Cities [Minneapolis/Saint Paul]. It does concern me a lot."

– Mother of three, Polk County

"Inside of our household we've been good at it, but it's been hard to communicate race, especially within the last year. So that's been hard to navigate and discuss and looking at different perspectives. Maybe something that's needed – more education for parents in our area."

– Mother of three, Polk County

Modern families worry about bullying and social media.

"I am so worried about bullying, social media. I'm so worried about protecting her from a world of hate."

– Mother of two, Polk County

"My kids have come to me and said, 'My classmate has a smartphone. Everybody has a phone.' ... Even my seven year old has classmates with phones... Both from the perspective of a developing brain and also from the perspective of being fearful – especially of my daughters - of the constant awareness of how your life is perceived through the eyes of others. As young girls growing up, that is really frightening for me... So much in the world is hypersexualized, and I'm trying to walk a fine line between being sex-positive but also, protecting her from that hypersexualization... Right now, I'm just kind of winging it because there isn't a good guide for it."

– Mother of four, Burnett County

Parents need to enforce boundaries that protect children from friends' and family members' mental illness, alcohol misuse, and substance abuse.

"I grew up in a really traumatic childhood, and I don't think anyone has ever asked me, 'What is a safe environment for your kids?' I wouldn't want to intentionally expose them to anything [negative], but I don't necessarily have a plan. You're talking about people bringing violent behavior or aggressive behavior or some kind of, maybe it's just really heated political talk or debate. Our kids don't necessarily need to see people fighting... In the last year, I've had to distance myself from stuff that felt violent – not just like discussion."

– Mother of two, Polk County

"The older I get, some of my friends have grown, and some of them have not necessarily grown. Some of them have experienced addiction... I don't want to insulate [my kids] completely and say good people, bad people, but I also want to protect them. Having [my kids] be around people who I think provide positive influences on their lives has become very important to me."

– Mother of four, Burnett County

"My son from a young age has had a dad that battles addiction, so we've talked from a young age about what addiction looks like. That doesn't mean that he's any less of a person or that he loves him any less. He is definitely still his dad, and he still loves him. That was something we could talk to him about at a very young age."

– Mother of three, Polk County

Living through a pandemic has increased stressors on parents, which can be further complicated by intergenerational trauma bonds.

"I switched to home schooling, and we made the decision not to send our kids back in the middle of the year. I had a high-risk pregnancy with gestational diabetes... We were very physically and socially isolated from the people who were our support... [Because we don't have family we can trust with our kids]."

– Mother of four, Burnett County

"When schools closed last Spring, I was having to take care of my one year old, work my full-time job, and teach my kindergartener... She [found] every single way to fight me on [it]... Me and my partner figured out how to share online learning, so we both work about ¾ time now."

– Mother of two, Polk County

Some parents feel supported by specific local resources and programs, while other parents experience barriers to accessing other services.

I love the library... If the library had bimonthly community circles focusing on parents. Not about getting together and having beers, just about parenting."

– Mother of two, Polk County

"Wouldn't it be cool if they would offer "summer camp" style programs through the schools to get to know the parents in your [kids'] schools? That way, you're meeting the people who are in your circle."

– Mother of four, Burnett County

"At the school, I have done the Parents as Partners groups, but you also get different views, so you might not share the same values."

– Mother of three, Polk County

"Power Up is through the hospital [Amery's Health Partners]... They're sending healthy kid options for kids, recipes. Hospital in New Richmond offers services, and WEAP and other specific disability coalitions in the area [provide families support]. There's a NAMI office in River Falls. There's also a recovery ministry program, AA-type groups, and there's a mental health crisis line throughout the whole state of Wisconsin that people can contact, too."

– Mother of three, Polk County

"I think about the high vulnerability times postpartum, we're trying to restore our bodies and our health and figure out how this new person fits into our lives and our families... I would love to see postnatal doula services granted money from the state, especially after that first year after the baby's born."

– Mother of two, Polk County

RECOMMENDATIONS

Western Region

As a way to support parents in helping their children to thrive and be raised in safe, stable and nurturing families and communities, participants focused on three clusters of concerns where recommendations can be identified. The first recommendation is focused on providing services at three levels – child, parent and family, while the second and third recommendations are focused on providing programming and resources to parents and the community.

Specific recommendations involved postpartum doula services, one year paid maternity and paternity leave to increase parental bonds with children, a 24/7-crisis line without fear of retribution and increased opportunities for parent-specific socialization. All agreed it's difficult to find opportunities to socialize without kids and without alcohol.

1. **Increase caseworkers, programs and services to support families through a trauma informed care lens.**

   RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

   - Parents with traumatic childhoods focus on healing as they raise their children.
   - Parents need to enforce boundaries that protect children from friends' and family members' mental illness, alcohol misuse, and substance abuse.
   - Living through a pandemic has increased stress on parents.
   - Some parents feel supported by specific local resources and programs, while other parents experience barriers to accessing services.
   - Western Wisconsin communities need to prioritize addressing race relations, given their proximity to Minneapolis (where Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd).

2. **Offer co-parents education to improve communication and resources to communicate with kids around mental illness and addiction issues.**

   RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

   - Parents with traumatic childhoods focus on healing as they raise their children.
   - Parents need to enforce boundaries that protect children from friends' and family members' mental illness, alcohol misuse, and substance abuse.
   - Co-parenting with a parent in a different home complicates parenting.

3. Invest in community education around anti-bullying and how to talk about racism.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Western Wisconsin communities need to prioritize addressing race relations, given their proximity to Minneapolis (where Chauvin killed George Floyd).
- Modern families worry about bullying and social media.

SOUTHEASTERN REGION

MILWAUKEE, KENOSHA, RACINE, AND WALWORTH COUNTIES

Demographics

Two listening sessions were conducted in the Southeastern Region – one session with Milwaukee County residents and the other with Kenosha, Racine and Walworth County parents. For reporting purposes, the two sessions' key findings and recommendations have been combined in this section. There were six parents from Milwaukee, two from Walworth, two from Kenosha, and one from Racine for a total of 11 parents. Six of the parents were Black, one Latina, and four were White. There were three fathers, all were Black and from Milwaukee. The average number of children for participants is 2.27, ranging in age from 2 to 17 years of age. There were four single parents, two from Walworth, and one each from Racine and Kenosha. It's important to be mindful of the role that historical racial injustices, elevated by the Jacob Blake shooting and subsequent killing of Joseph Rosenbaum, might have had on the conversation.

Key Findings

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, decades of police brutality, inequities in the criminal and social justice system, and other racial and health inequities has reached the tipping point in Southeastern WI. Many of the key findings are reflective of the turbulent racial climate in the region.

Living through a pandemic has increased anxiety and needs.

"I've just been panicking about [my kids] being around other people and enjoying themselves outside because I don't know if the park is clean. Then I'm panicking about other kids being sick."

– Mother of two, Kenosha County

"My self-care is poor. I go through many trainings about self-care, but I'm stuck. I don't know how to give myself anything... This is probably my self-care right here, talking about it."

– Father of two, Milwaukee

"After the pandemic, there needs to be immediate response programs to heal children's nutrition, psychological (bullying), screens, sedentary, isolation, suicide prevention. Needs to be teen-friendly and culturally appropriate for minority groups." – **Father of two, Milwaukee**

"This pandemic has been an eye-opening event for many families...[it's been stressful dealing with] multiple pandemics - COVID, racism, police brutality." – **Father of two, Milwaukee**

Families need more mental health care providers and crisis response resources, especially services that specialize in caring for children and families.

"[There's a] lack of mental health care providers, especially for kids."
– Mother of six, Kenosha County

"The waiting list to get into a psychiatrist for [my daughter] is five or six months... That's horrible. The waiting lists!"
– Mother of two, Walworth County

"We do have a 24-hour crisis phone number that they can come to your home or your workplace... But there's often a long wait because there's just not enough of them, and our community is in need."
– Mother of six, Kenosha County

Parents of children with special needs require support to succeed.

"Safety is a factor because of [my son's] impulse control issues... I need a school that's capable of handling his special needs... I'm not able to work because I get calls [to provide in-person support for my special needs son.]"
– Mother of six, Kenosha County

"My 16 year old. She has ADHD. When dealing with the loss of her father. It's a lot, much harder because with the ADHD, she's more rebellious. You know, and they, have it wrong, you know, different medications."
– Mother of two, Racine County

"My daughter has Type 2 diabetes... I participate in a lot of diabetic counseling classes with my daughter... I wish they had more."
– Mother of two, Racine County

"It's hard to understand [my daughter] because she has bad tantrums... I started therapy for my kids, and they're enrolled in sign language classes because I have a deaf child, too."
– Mother of two, Kenosha County

Parents think more resources should be directed to prevent bullying in schools and on social media.

"The bullying with these kids is so bad. [My daughter] doesn't want to go to school because she doesn't feel safe at school. It's so different with social media. They're not even safe at home from bullying."

– Mother of two, Walworth County

"They don't talk about bullying. My daughter gets bullied a lot in school, and they don't do nothing about it."

– Mother of two, Kenosha County

Parents want improved safety.

"I have felt more uncomfortable in my community... I think we need a better-trained police force and more police officers... and more crisis support... We're using those services when our son is really having a hard time, and we need extra support."

– Mother of six, including adopted African American son, Kenosha County (White)

"We live in neighborhoods where it's not safe to go outside. We've got drug dealers next door to you, across the street from you."

– Mother of two, Racine County (African American)

"Safety. It's hard for me to walk because I don't have a car. Sometimes I'm afraid to cross the street. People don't even stop when you have the right of way to walk. A car almost hit my daughter because they're flying back and forth. It's bad!"

– Mother of two, Kenosha County (African American)

There's mistrust for police in historically disenfranchised communities.

"[Police] should be [trustworthy]. We should be able to feel safe around them. We should be able to feel human around them."

– Mother of two, Walworth County (Hispanic)

"I wish the racism would stop. I'm sick and tired of that. I'm sick of my kids having to come home and want to have discussions about it. They don't know how to handle it. They're up in fear. ...All the police brutality against African Americans. It's sickening, and it's very tiresome."

– Mother of two, Racine County (African American)

"I don't want my child to grow up and be afraid of the police or not like the police. You see those videos with police shooting basketball with the kids, [I want to see] more activities like that [by officers] in the community."

– Mother of two children, one LGBTQ+, Walworth County

"I want to see more African American officers on the [Kenosha police] force to make more African American men feel less picked out because there's so many white officers on the force and not many of us... If it can be done in Racine, it can be done in [Kenosha]."

– Mother of two, Racine County (African American)

"I have been advised to always ask for a trauma-informed police officer to report to my home. I have to rely on law enforcement because we need that extra support [for my special needs African American son]... I trust police, historically, but I am not African American, so I try really hard to ask for a trauma-informed officer. I want to support my son as a young man who is African American as he will encounter the police more and more, and that's where we are at with his needs. I have to trust the police to do the right thing, but [my son's safety] does cross my mind."

– Mother of six, including adopted African American son, Kenosha County (White)

Parents want access to safe, affordable, flexible, licensed, trauma-informed childcare.

"It's really hard to have gaps in childcare. [We need] quality, affordable childcare, licensed childcare... It has to be licensed because most people are ill equipped to handle our child's special needs."

– Mother of six, Kenosha County

"I have tried going on my county's rummage sale sites searching for a sitter, and so many people are not licensed, and they still try to charge [me] half my paycheck to watch my children. I'm always having childcare issues... [In rural areas], daycares out here are not 24/7. They're only first [shift] and not even half a second shift. They mostly end by 6 or 7 p.m."

– Mother of two, Walworth County

Some parents feel supported by specific local resources and programs, while other parents experience barriers to accessing services.

It's worth noting that the Milwaukee Listening Session was dominated by four fathers, who weren't able to share detailed information on existing programs, but did mention a few programs and service gaps. Services mentioned by mothers from Milwaukee from a later session (Northern/Southeastern) are also included here in an effort to provide the full list of programs generated by Milwaukee participants.

MILWAUKEE

- Urban Ecology Center
- Oak Leaf Trail
- Milwaukee Recreation Center – highly recommended
- Financial literacy classes for youth and parents
- Programs that provide gas money and financial help to cover daily living expenses
- Care Net, Women's Center, Strong Baby Sanctuary

KENOSHA

"I have used the Boys and Girls Club... I have networked with Women and Children's Horizon for their grief classes for my daughter having a deceased parent. I have networked with NAMI Wisconsin... The Job Center in Kenosha did lead and guide me to a lot of resources."

– Mother of two, Racine County (formerly long-time Kenosha resident)

"We have really awesome pediatricians in Kenosha, a great call center community... We have an up-and-coming Children's Hospital presence, so lots of specialists are local now... We are enrolled in Families First, so it helps provide therapy and occupational therapy for my son... Our bus system definitely has some gaps, but we're thankful that we have a public transportation system."

– Mother of six, Kenosha County

"Professional Service Network is a parenting group that's good with disabled kids and regular kids, and they're in Kenosha and Racine... They have a lot of classes... and teenager groups they have there, too."

– Mother of two, Kenosha County

"The Hope Council does some alcohol and drug supports."

– Mother of six, Kenosha County

"I'm a felon, so across the board, I'm not able to get housing, so I run into a lot of problems about that."

– Mother of two, Walworth County

RACINE

"Racine [Job Center] is nothing like Kenosha. They don't have helpful information. The system here is slow. I can go to Kenosha [Job Center] and get helpful information, but in Racine, [the Job Center] either doesn't know or they don't have it."

– Mother of two, Racine County (formerly long-time Kenosha resident)

WALWORTH

"For energy assistance, Saint Vincent was a huge help for me when I lived [in Racine]."

– Mother of two, Walworth County

"I was 19 when I got pregnant, the Teen Pregnancy Group... talk about car seat safety... and SIDS... They give you free stuff, like a pack-n-play, binky, etc... The Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) program teaches about generations of trauma and toxic cycles... And parenting skills you don't learn from abusive parents."

– Mother of two, Walworth County

"I was always referred to Walworth County Crisis... They will refer you to any other programs and services available... I feel [Walworth] County is way more individualized [than larger/more populated counties].")

– Mother of two, Walworth County

RECOMMENDATIONS

Southeastern Region

A significant amount of services, programs and resources are needed in the Southeastern Region to support parents in raising children in safe, supportive and nurturing environments. Key areas of need involve augmenting the number of caseworkers for parents of children with special needs.

1. Increase caseworkers to support families with special needs children.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Living through a pandemic has increased anxiety.
- Parents of children with special needs require support to succeed.
- Families need more mental health care providers and crisis response resources, especially services that specialize in caring for children and families.

2. Invest in proven public safety prevention instead of more police (improving public infrastructure; funding community education campaigns in anti-bullying and pedestrian safety yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks).

Participants discussed neighborhood blight, specifically streetlights that don't work. Parents talked about the lack of public transportation in Walworth County and gaps in Racine and Kenosha. Parents from all counties stressed reckless driving and bullying as serious safety problems.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Parents of children with special needs require support to succeed.
- Parents think more resources should be directed to prevent bullying in schools and on social media.
- Parents want improved safety.
- There's mistrust for police in historically disenfranchised communities.

3. Train police in trauma-informed approaches and in community policing practices.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Parents of children with special needs require support to succeed.
- Families need more mental health care providers and crisis response resources, especially services that specialize in caring for children and families.
- Parents want improved safety.
- There's mistrust for police in historically disenfranchised communities.

4. Make trauma-informed behavioral health care accessible to children, parents and families.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Living through a pandemic has increased anxiety and needs
- Families need more mental health care providers and crisis responses resources, especially for services that specialize in caring for children and families.
- Parents think more resources should be directed to prevent bullying in schools and on social media
- Parents want access to safe, affordable, flexible and licensed, trauma-informed childcare.

NORTHEASTERN REGION

BROWN, CALUMET, OUTAGAMIE AND SHAWANO COUNTIES

Demographics

This session consisted of seven participants, two each from Brown, Outagamie and Calumet Counties, and one from Shawano County. The average number of children was 2.14, ranging in ages from one year to 16 years of age. All of the parents were married. All participants were White.

Key Findings

A great deal of time was spent discussing stressors of raising a family, while maintaining employment, post-education training and careers for working families. The challenges of co-parenting, accessing behavioral health care for children and the entire family unit and the dearth of support for working families, teenage boys, older parents and undocumented families was also discussed.

Parents have many stressors and are juggling parenting responsibilities.

"I had my first child when I was sixteen and my last child at fifty. It's really stressful to keep up with a five year old and not to lose my patiences."

– Mother of two, Brown County

"One of my stressors that I had to deal with for the last two years that I never thought I'd have to deal with is that one of my children has mental health issues. My oldest step son has some mental health issues. I have a good social work background and I work with kids who have mental health issues, but when it's your own child who has mental health issues it's a different story. It really is. You make or break your relationship with your husband. We stood strong. We made it through."

– Mother of one, Brown County

" The world's greatest plate juggler of life is the best summary of me trying to manage life. I thought it would get easier as they got older, the ability to organizing so many lives is important."

– Mother of two, Calumet County

"Multi-tasking. It feels like that's what I do most often.Whether it's with my kids, their schedules, my work schedule, my husband's schedule. You know, just kind of figuring out what all needs to be done in more hours in a day than I have. So trying to kind of put everything together and make sure everybody is safe, fed, you know, has slept, all of those different pieces. So again, not my preference to multitask, but certainly a necessity in our family."

– Mother of three, including twin boys, Calumet County

Parents understand the concept of nurturing parents and "fight" to find time to nurture their children.

"A nurturing parent is compassionate and is willing to put in all of the time and effort to give everything to their children."

– Mother of four, Shawano County

"I thought a lot about my mom who was very busy, worked a lot when I was growing up, but I always felt like when I was with her, like I was the only one that mattered. And so like I'm trying to have grace and compassion with myself with that. I'm working to make sure that time and energy is really focused, even if it's not in long amounts."

– Mother of four, Shawano County

Co-parenting and raising children in blended families complicates parenting.

"I am a non-biological parent and a primary parent.The boys have an absent mom. And so there's a lot of additional baggage that's carried by them and brought into our relationship. Sometimes that is a very real stressor. And sometimes that's an imaginary stressor. And so I recognize just that our life is a stressor and so I have embraced therapy and talking about it [to someone]."

– Mother of two, Calumet County

"...talking about the co-parenting too. He [my husband] thinks things should be done one way, because the way he was raised and I think things should be done another way. And so how do you deal with that fall out? You may have blow ups and then you feel guilty about having the blow up. And then of course it [the blow up]kind of filters down to the kids too."

– Mother of one, Brown County

Access to mental health care services is a concern for all parents - low income, middle-income and undocumented families.

Parents in Brown, Calumet, Shawano and Outagamie County all shared disheartening accounts of the lack of mental health care services in their region.

> "There's so many kids, even if they have very active and attentive parents, the services are not available in a proximity that a second shift parent or a farm parent or the parents in our community are available to bring their children, even if all the other things align and there is service, you can't match those and connections, especially for teenage boys. We really struggled to offer those services to a 12 and 14 year old boy in our family."
>
> **– Mother of three, including twin boys, Calumet County**

> A lot of my students went down hill during the time of COVID because of being isolated. And those kids who already were struggling with mental health issues."
>
> **– Mother of one, Brown County**

> "We lived up North Wisconsin at the time I would consider us a privileged family. We have insurance. We have two parents that willing to help. Even with both of us working, the added costs, taking off of work to transport. And again, I would consider us a very lucky and a privileged family. It's still a challenge to be able to connect him [our son] with services."
>
> **– Mother of two, Calumet County**

> I live in Shawano County, but I live. I work on the Menominee reservation so I'm in Menominee County almost every day. And I was going to say what [the others said] mental health issues and domestic violence and being in COVID and being isolated, my students at school just tanked. I mean, they were already struggling with mental health issues. Not having those personal connections really affected them.
>
> **– Mother of four, Shawano County**

> "I deal a lot with undocumented kids too. We cannot get services for those kids. And to find a psychiatrist to work with students is really bad, and then to find mental health providers who are willing to accept State insurance."
>
> **– Mother of two, Outagamie County**

> "A lot of my students went down hill during the time of COVID because of being isolated. And those kids who already were struggling with mental health issues. A lot of them go in homes where there is domestic violence where there's drugs, there's alcohol, there is physical sexual violence. So those kids dealt a lot with mental health issues."
>
> **– Father of two, Bad River, Milwaukee**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Northeastern Region

1. **Reduce barriers to mental health care in the region, including availability of providers, hours operation, proximity of service, and specialized services for teen boys and undocumented families.**

   RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

   - Access to mental health care services is a concern for all parents - low income, middle class, undocumented, etc.
   - Parents have many stressors and are juggling parenting responsibilities.

2. **Provide support to working families so they can allocate quality time with their children.**

   RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

   - Parents have many stressors and are juggling parenting responsibilities.
   - Parents understand the concept of nurturing parents and "fight" to find time to nurture their children.

3. **Provide support to families in crisis, including co-parenting support.**

   RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

   - Co-parenting and raising children in blended families complicates parenting.
   - Parents have many stressors and are juggling parenting responsibilities.
   - Access to mental health care services is a concern for all parents - low income, middle income, and undocumented.

STATEWIDE

HISPANIC/LATINO LISTENING SESSIONS

Demographics

Eleven participants participated in two listening sessions targeting Hispanic/Latino parents – one conducted in English and the other in Spanish. Participants were predominantly Mexican. The average number of children was 2, and children of participants ranged in age from 1 month to 17 years. Most of the Key Findings paralleled the regional groups, but the Spanish-speaking session stressed the importance of language translation as a barrier to accessing resources and services.

Key Findings

1. Parents identified supporting their children's education, providing emotional support, dedicating quality time, and teaching about financial security as key aspects of parenting.

"Dedicating quality time to the family is important, I was raised that way, we always sat down to eat as a family and that is when we talked about everything... If I gain their trust and talk to them about the reality of life, they talk to me about everything and we trust each other more."
– Mother of two, Milwaukee

"I talk to my kids a lot about savings and saving for the future and thinking about the future and education. All I can do is try to prepare my kids. I told them the best thing for them to have as much experience and education as possible. No one can take that away from them. Even if they do lose their job in the future, they will have a trade or education to fall back on."
– Mother of two, West Allis

2. Parents need to care for themselves and their marriage to care for their kids.

"It can be incredibly lonely, where you feel like you're an island. You're entire world is just your kids... [You think], 'Wow, what do I like to do in my spare time?'... You lose yourself within parenting. As mothers, we do a lot more than a lot of people realize."
– Mother of one, Wauwatosa

"My husband and I went to a marriage support group... Now we have date night every other week away from the kids. Because we focused so much on [our kids] when they were younger, I know we love our kids, and we want to be around our kids all them time... But we need to take care of ourselves because we will burn out... Take care of yourself because that will help YOU, and it will reflect back on your kids."

– Mother of two, West Allis

3. Living through a pandemic has increased stressors on parents.

"I have really bad anxiety and depression, so the pandemic was terrible. It was just bad. What I did that helped me, I'd go outside. I'd go to the beach. I'd go for a walk... If you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of your kids... I ended up getting a therapist [and started taking depression medication]... I get sucked in where I'm drinking too much [alcohol]. It's a work in progress... I'm trying to use my resources."

– Mother of three, Racine

"Especially now with the pandemic [social distancing] lifting a little, we're able to go out more. This past year, I was more depressed because we weren't able to go anywhere or do anything, so that did interfere with my mood... I find myself being happier when I'm surrounded by my family members."

– Mother of two, West Allis

"Therapy itself was really helpful. It used to be included in my insurance, and now it's not anymore. It was considered preventative care. We had teletherapy included. That was always really good, and unfortunately, right before the pandemic it got cancelled. That would have been really helpful during the pandemic to have someone to talk to."

– Mother of three, Greenfield

"That whole pandemic was crazy on so many levels, as far as my son is a hands-on learner. He needs to be in front of a teacher in a classroom, but there was nothing else we could do other than the virtual [schooling]."

– Mother of one, Wauwatosa

4. Parents of children with special needs require support to succeed.

"When I did need help, it was the YMCA. It helped me a lot. My oldest son had diabetes. The way we kept active was to go there and do exercise together. His diabetes got better."

– Mother of two, Green Bay

"My son had ADHD, that was a stressor. I had to learn how to deal with him and how his mind works... Then with my daughter, she suffers from depression and anxiety... That was a big stressor... I had to talk with therapists, I had to talk to the school counselor, the principal... When you have kids with certain issues, you have to work with them extensively."

– Mother of two, West Allis

5. Co-parenting with a parent in a different home, stepparents, and/or as a single parent complicates parenting.

"You want your kids to have a good relationship with both parents. If you put that negative seed in there, it can grow, and you don't want that for them."

– Mother of three, Greenfield (two step children)

"Bringing in a new person that's going to be a permanent family member for the kids is very challenging. It's emotions, so understanding where they're coming from, and the new parent that's trying to help the other person. We've had some challenging moments with that."

– Mother of one, Wauwatosa

"Dad's not present at all... My second daughter, it was really hard for her, she was a daddy's girl... I try not to put too much focus on that they don't have a dad... If it's brought up, I don't ignore it... My second daughter, she had a hard time, but we're working through it."

– Mother of three, Racine

6. Parents depend on their schools, but schools can exacerbate problems.

"One thing that did help [with communication between my husband and I and their mother] is the school system getting on board with having two different email addresses on file or all three phone numbers... The school would send stuff home to mom but never to dad, but now we all know."

– Mother of three, Greenfield (two step children)

"The education they get here is different and creates language and communication barriers between us."

– Mother of two, Milwaukee

"I had to talk to the school counselor, I spoke with teachers. I spoke with the principal, vice principal. We had to put a plan in action... When you have kids with certain issues, you have to work with them extensively."

– Mother of two, West Allis (a son with ADHD and a daughter with depression and anxiety)

"Staying connected with the schools is the best way to stay informed. Schools provide lots of support and resources for parents. It is important to look for support in different venues because if you always want to go to family for advice, you should remember, if the advice they are giving was something used on you, when growing up, and you might not agree with it, or it may not have worked."

– Mother of two, Milwaukee

7. Many parenting challenges are related to communications, with differences in language and culture serving as barriers.

"I see that in my community I wish there were more mental health resources. Sometimes I hear of people that don't go get help because they can't afford it or don't know how to access it. I wish therapy and mental health help was more accessible for parents and children and in Spanish."
– Mother of one, Milwaukee

"Spanish services are not accessible here when you see the doctors. A lot of time there are limited interpretation services and it's not accurate. **– Mother of five, Whitehall**

"Sometimes we go all the way to Milwaukee to get help in Spanish [for] WIC or Zumba and it is a hassle to have to do that." **– Mother of three, West Allis**

"Being a parent is a process and you have to recognize that your experience growing up is much different than your children's, you grew up in a different country with different ways, you cannot threaten a kid with showing them a chancla, (slipper), discipline is different here."
– Mother of three, Trempealeau County

"The education they get here is different and creates language and communication barriers between us." **– Mother of one, raising one grandchild, Verona**

8. Participants mentioned these specific services as ones they had accessed:

- Local Nonprofit Programs: Lola's New Beginnings-Milwaukee, Core El Centro-Milwaukee, Promotores-Milwaukee, Centro Hispano-Madison, Salvation Army/Kroc Community Center-Green Bay, Casa Alba-Melanie-Green Bay, YMCA-Multiple, St. Vincent De Paul- Multiple
- State and Municipal Services: WIC Program, Whitehall Public Library, Public Schools
- Health Centers: Sixteenth Street Clinic, Gunderson Hospital
- Local places of worship

RECOMMENDATIONS

Two Hispanic/Latino Listening Sessions

1. Prioritize culturally competent Spanish language translation services.

Individual Children Services, Individual Parent Services, Family Unit Services, Community and Environment Resources.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Many parenting challenges related to communication, with the differences in language and culture serving as barriers.

- Spanish speaking parents pointed out language and cultural barriers to access services and programming. Participants talked about language barriers and cultural differences in education, discipline, and health care.

2. Offer single parents additional services.

Individual Parent Services, Family Unit Services, Community and Environment Resources.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Co-parenting with a parent in a different home, stepparents, and/or as a single parent complicates parenting.

3. Increase caseworkers to support families, and always provide culturally competent Spanish-speaking caseworkers.

Individual Children Services, Family Unit Services, Community and Environment Resources.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Living through a pandemic has increased stressors on parents.
- Parents of children with special needs require support to succeed.
- Many parenting challenges were related to communication, with the differences in language and culture serving as barriers.
- Parents need to care for themselves and their marriage to care for their kids.

4. Invest in organizations and schools already trusted in the community.

Individual children services, Individual Parent Services, Family Unit Services, Community and Environment Resources.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Parents identified supporting their children's education, providing emotional support, dedicating quality time, and teaching about financial security as key aspects of parenting.
- Parents depend on their schools, but schools can exacerbate problems.
- Many parenting challenges were related to communication, with the differences in language and culture serving as barriers.
- Many participants had accessed individual and family services (such as mental health care). They named several trusted community organizations and talked about the importance of working with the schools to educate their children.

STATEWIDE

NATIVE AMERICAN LISTENING SESSIONS

Demographics

There were two groups conducted with Native Americans from across the state. Participants were from several tribes – Bad River, North Arapaho, Cheyenne, St. Croix/Mille Lacs, Red Cliff, Lac du Flambeau, Stockbridge-Munsee, Oneida, Grand Traverse of Ottawa and Chippewa. There was one non-tribal mother married to a Bad River Tribal member. There were six single parents and two fathers. The average number of children per participant was two, ranging in age from five to 18 years old. There was one parent of a special needs child and one parent of an LGBTQ+ youth.

Key Findings

1. Parents struggle to meet the basic needs of their families.

- "Not having dinner is just as much [a problem] as not having stable housing."
  – Mother of two, Stockbridge-Munsee, Oconomowoc

- "I am working more and more and having to increase my income as much as possible. And I am exhausted, physically, emotionally, mentally, everything."
  – Mother of one, Onedia Milwaukee

- It's [meeting basic needs] affected my ability having that compassion and presence with my children. And not being on edge and agitated when I'm trying to resolve something."
  – Mother of one, Lac du Flambeau

2. Providing emotional support was viewed as being just as important as providing basic needs.

- "I'm making sure I'm learning how to be emotionally available for my children, which is something that should have been instilled in me when I was their age, you know? And it can cause a really big deficit growing up."
  – Mother of one, Lac du Flambeau

- "Historical Trauma, I keep hearing how it hasn't been dealt with. That is why we are hearing a lot about being there emotionally for your child. That is sometimes more important than providing basic needs."
  – Mother of one, Lac du Flambeau

3. Historical Trauma and other forms of trauma are still impacting the mental health and well-being of families.

- "Blood memory is still with us. We are only two to three generations away from when the boarding school era occurred.. there is still a feeling of genocide and lack of trust."
  – Mother of four, Bad River, Ashland

- "I think behavioral health needs to take place. For parents as probably as well as their children."
  – Father of two, Bad River, Milwaukee

- "I understand what true historical trauma is. And I mean, it's real. This burial site of 215 kids in Canada....Let's just get rid of the Indians. We just kill them all and throw them into a pile."
  – Mother of two, Stockbridge-Munsee, Oconomowoc

- "We had a lot of different stuff happened growing up. And one of them was being the death of my grandfather who was like a father to us. My mom ended up so lost in her own grief that she wasn't able to help us deal with ours... it took years before I managed to get into therapy to even be able to begin to deal with taking care of my own grandfather while he was dying."
  – Mother of four, Red Cliff, Bayfield

4. Child care is a major stressor and concern for Native American parents.

- "Navigating the whole system of child care can be a big stressor."
  – Mother of two North Arapaho/Cheyenne, Wood County

- "It's not black and white. It's not as easy as you do this and you get that when it comes to state child care. You could get cut off of one program if another family member is on another. Some people move from one house to another. There's a lot of gray and there's a lot of trauma."
  – Mother of two, Stockbridge-Munsee, Oconomowac

- "I have a whole slew of things...sexual assault, physical abuse, domestic violence and I struggle to trust people to watch my children and when I find someone I trust I'm paying $900 a month in child care."
  – Mother of four, Red Cliff, Bayfield

- "It's a struggle when you've got to go to work to support your family, but then how are you supposed to do that when there's no day care."
  – Mother of three, St. Croix/Mille Lacs

- "If there was a way, say your cousin could become a babysitter without all that certification. I think that would make it easier."
  – Mother of four, Bad River, Ashland

- "Certification makes it so hard for them because the state has so many things they have to do to get certified."
  – Mother of four, Bad River, Ashland County

5. Better coordination of services supporting Native Americans' mobility to seek higher paying jobs is needed.

- "WI Natives move a lot it can be challenging. Some Natives want to 'get off the rez' and move to a city for more job opportunities but it is like culture/shell shock when they get there. Transportation/housing/supportive services can all become issues. It would be nice to have a Transitional program to help that process."
  – Mother of one, Oneida, Milwaukee

- "You know, a lot of us moved to the bigger cities because you know, there's more jobs, there's more pay, there's more opportunity, but we don't have that community and daily support so many of us need to help raise our families so then we go back to our family...to the reservation. That cycle tends to repeat itself so we have a lot of mobility issues."
  – Mother of two, Stockbridge- Munsee, Oconomowoc

- "Culture shock when moving to the city or vice versa...moving from the city to the rez. adjusting to each environment has its challenges."
  – Father of two, Lac du Flambeau

- "State benefits are determined on who's in the household. And so I've legitimately contemplated. Is it worse going to live with my grandma for a couple of months while I get on my feet again? Because if I do, I lose all my state benefits like healthcare and food share."
  – Mother of four, Bad River, Ashland

- "That is where a lot of the frustration comes in is when you're in a city you're getting serviced by state and county services, and then when you go back to the reservation, then you're getting tribal services and it's like the right hand of government is not talking to the left hand."
  – Father of two, Bad River, Milwaukee

- "If you're from a tribe that doesn't have an office here [in the city] it can be very difficult get the services you may be entitled to."
  – Mother of one, Grand Traverse of Ottawa and Chippewa, West Allis
  – Mother of one, Lac du Flambeau, resides in Milwaukee (agreed with West Allis Mother)

6. Drug and substance treatment and recovery destabilize the entire family.

- "Transitioning from treatment can be tough. There aren't enough resources like transitional living to help those coming out of treatment."
  – Father of two, Bad River, Milwaukee

- "A person goes through recovery, risks relapse and losing their children because there isn't a comprehensive infrastructure for the individual and the family to protect the individual from going back to the same environments and conditions that created the drug dependency."
  – Mother of two, North Arapaho/Cheyenne, Wood County

7. Programming and services varies.

Participants mentioned these as successful programs:

- Birth to 3
- Brighter Future Initiatives for PreTeens/Early Teens
- Boys and Girls Club
- Gerald Ignace Health Center in Milwaukee
- Healthy Start
- Healthy Families
- Indian Community School in Milwaukee
- Mashgiiziibii Youth Services through UW Extension
- Spark which offers a skateboard park, BMX biking and other activities.
- Trails Program
- Vilas County Foster Care
- Wisconsin Emergency Rental Assistance (WERA)

Participants mentioned these service gaps:

- Programming for teens
- Programming to help keep kids active
- Family support services and opportunities that are not based on income
- Food banks
- Transitional housing for families going through drug recovery

RECOMMENDATIONS

Native American Listening Sessions

1. Improve coordination of services across systems and districts (state, county, tribal) to meet the needs of Native American children and families.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Better coordination of services supportive Native Americans' mobility to seek higher paying jobs is needed.
- Drug and substance treatment and recovery destabilizes the entire family.
- Participants struggle to meet basic needs.
- Historical Trauma and other forms of trauma are still impacting the mental health and well-being of families.

2. Increase the availability of trauma-informed care and behavioral health care for children and families.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Providing emotional support was viewed as being just as important as providing basic needs.
- Historical Trauma and other forms of trauma are still impacting the mental health and well-being of families.

3. Streamline child care certification process and paperwork to support kinship care.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Child care is a major stressor and concern for Native American parents.

LGBTQ+ LISTENING SESSION

BROWN, MILWAUKEE, KENOSHA, OZAUKEE, AND WAUKESHA COUNTIES

Demographics

A listening session for parents identifying as LGBTQ+ or parents of LGBTQ+ children and adolescents was facilitated with eleven parents. Diversity across the gender spectrum included parents who identified as non-binary, lesbian and straight. Participants also identified as parents of straight, non-binary, transgender, gender-fluid, bisexual and pansexual children. The average number of children was two, ranging in age from five to 16 years of age.

Key Findings

Parents identified inequitable government policies that discriminate against and dehumanize LGBTQ+ families as a barrier to raising LGBTQ+ children in safe, stable and nurturing communities and families.

Uniquely from other families, LGBTQ+ families face systemic policy barriers at all levels of government starting at birth (birth certificates, gender markers, mother/father parental identification, bathrooms and other gendered facilities) harming parents' dignity, safety, and access to their own children.

Parents feel like they have to shield their families from the impact of public policy and feel a responsibility to become advocates to change these policies.

- "There's not a system and a structure inherently that welcomes LGBTQ+ parents and families."
  – Milwaukee, identifies as a lesbian with two children

- "A lot of the stressors where there are similarities between being a queer parent and having LGBTQ + children, is that there's a lot of systemic oppression and a lot of structural inequities."
  – Milwaukee, identifies as a lesbian with two children

- "As a parent, [I need to] advocate that we keep moving to a place where we don't have to have these discussions. Where people can identify or express themselves and society accepts that, and we're not such a binary society."
  – Milwaukee, gay father, three children including one transgender

- "I feel like I really have to take action. Like me educating people only goes so far... and explaining things to people. But the systems are what they are. I'm at the point of wanting to take action and not knowing where to begin."
  – Identifies as straight mother, two children, one non-binary Green Bay

Wisconsin's existing public infrastructures– education, health care, mental health, substance abuse treatment, housing, policing for families (even when well intentioned and resourced) are not sensitive to and equipped to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ families and/or children.

Parents in LGBTQ+ families and LGBTQ+ kids are spending their time, energy, and resources fighting against systems meant to help them, while children without parental advocacy often fall through cracks.

- "There are people who are moving forward on their own, but the systems aren't there yet. Some are catching up but it's way too slow." **– Identifies as a lesbian, two gender fluid children, Bayside**

- "Even if [LGBTQ+ youth] have a protective, nurturing, providing parent, they have to interface with the systems that are totally harmful and completely problematic. Awareness raising is only one step, there needs to be a greater step." **– Identifies as a lesbian, two children, Milwaukee**

- "Our school systems and our day care settings and all of the places where we have to interact as a family, are not necessarily always equipped to actually embrace our families."
  – Identifies as a lesbian, two children, Milwaukee

- "I feel like one of the things that would be more helpful for parents and kids is if there was more education early on about the full gender spectrum and everything related to gender and orientation. I think there's a lot of misunderstanding and it starts with schools."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, two children, one non-binary, Green Bay

- "I think queering parenting is the necessity at this point for me, and I think that can happen among all the parents that are represented here. How can I be effective in disrupting the systemic status quo? I don't think it just start in the homes, it happens in the way that our communities engage and interact with each other based upon our socialization."
  – Identifies as a lesbian, two children, Milwaukee

- "It needs to start younger. I did have hard time finding support at the middle school age, when they really need help. And younger. The programs need to start earlier if we're going to support our kids. We didn't support them early enough. There are resources in high school but what do we do until then. Age appropriate programs need to start much younger."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, one transgender child, Kenosha

Parents highlighted common threats of mental distress and bullying, and how life-saving quality and early mental health resources can be for LGBTQ+ children and parents.

LGBTQ+ families suffer trauma and associated mental illness and addiction, yet also experience barriers to accessing LGBTQ+ friendly resources. Finding therapy resources is difficult but finding an LGBTQ+ provider or even a LGBTQ+ friendly is often impossible, especially in rural Wisconsin.

- "[Our children need] empathy and acceptance, and just being there. I think the biggest thing and listening... and providing therapy that's needed once you reach a point where you realize that your child needs that."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, two children, one non-binary, Green Bay

- "I did not as a parent realize that the journey required more therapy than I understood. I thought being accepting and saying I love you was enough. What I thought I was doing as a parent was the right thing. But I missed so many opportunities for [my child] to get help and to have someone to guide him."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, one transgender child, Kenosha

- "It's really important to find a therapist who specializes or is at least very knowledgeable about LGBTQ stuff regarding youth. I don't know of too many resources in the area."
  – Identifies as a lesbian, two gender-fluid children, Bayside

- "We're trying to be the safe space for our children, but also knowing that we need to get extra help when we can't be the safe space." **– Identifies as straight mother, six children, one bisexual**

- "We need something that's a whole-child approach that takes into account that our whole child comes from a two Mom family." **– Identifies as a lesbian, two gender-fluid children, Bayside**

Parents highlighted diversity, intersectionality, and fluidity within the LGBTQ+ community that requires complex and thoughtful care.

The LGBTQ+ community is inherently diverse and intersectional with many individuals having unique experiences and needs.

The group highlighted specific needs for 1) transgender children separate from the LGB community, 2) LGBTQ+ parents separate from heterosexual parents of LGBTQ+ children, 3) Black and Brown LGBTQ+ families separate from white LGBTQ+ families, and 4) Rural families separate from those in cities who have access to a higher density of LGBTQ+ community resources. Additionally, 5) LGBTQ+ children without parental support or who are homeless fall through many of the cracks without parental resources.

- "LGBTQ+ issues can't all be smooshed together, which is what LGBTQ+ work does this all the time. We're not allowing people to have enough space to be able to communicate.... I think it's very distinct and different."
  – Identifies as a lesbian, two children, Milwaukee

Parents identified the LGBTQ+ community and peer support as the most important and helpful parental resources.

Parents noted the most useful resource they access is "the village" or "the community" of other LGBTQ+ families. Heterosexual parents of LGBTQ+ children often do not know this network exists nor have any connection to the LGBTQ+ community resources and services. When accessed, this network of parents and ally providers is informal and rarely receives any direct resources. Outside of large cities, there are literally no parent/family support groups, LGBTQ+ centers, school GSAs, or resources for LGBTQ+ families. LGBTQ+ parents take on the burden of being the resources that are missing in their communities.

LGBTQ+ Parent-to-Parent Support

- "Basically people who are queer, who know how to organize and know how to advocate, have created community out of necessity because our world does not create space for LGBTQ+ people to also be parents while also holding our identities as LGBTQ+ people."
  – Identifies as a lesbian, two children, Milwaukee

- "The village came to help me. The village has really stepped up to help me from the school, from the public including my neighbors, and I didn't realize they had similar situations themselves."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, one transgender child, Kenosha

- "It's like you have to kind of decipher this code out in the wild, even as a parent, to figure out who I can share and get support from. It's been really hard for my husband and I to kind of traverse. It's not like hey here's this baby playgroup, like to go meet new moms, sort of a thing. There's nothing like that easy to find for us."
  – Identifies as a straight mother of six, one bisexual child, Bayside

- "I'm 56 years old. I was raised very Catholic. So I didn't really know about the LGBTQ+ community and... it just never really came up. So when [my son's] needs were more than I could do as a parent, I could not help."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, one transgender child, Kenosha

- "Our child was taken in, and once I knew I needed help, the youth crisis center put me in touch with everybody. She really pointed me in amazing directions and I never knew that these programs existed in Kenosha. It was eye opening. I didn't know the village had these programs, but when I needed it the village came through and I'm so grateful."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, one transgender child, Kenosha

Peer Support & Mentorship

- "I'd like to see more youth-led groups, something where they can find support from each other. Also maybe something led by older LGBTQ+ youth coming in, groups of young people get a lot out of that."
  – **pronoun they/them, three children, including one transgender, Milwaukee**

- "I do feel like there is a lack of mentorship, a lack of being able to see someone like themselves."
  – Identifies as non-binary, one gender-fluid child, Wauwatosa

- "I wish I could find, and I have been looking for a teen group where they could meet. Even if it's one of them, once a month, you know for a couple of hours."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, one transgender child, Kenosha

- "One of the hardest things was finding people to talk to. To share my experiences because when my children came out, they wanted it to be private."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, two children, one non-binary child, Green Bay

- "That meeting with the other parents has really been a godsend for me because I couldn't understand why my kid hated me." **– Identifies as a straight mother, one transgender child, Kenosha**

LGBTQ+ Organizations

- "If you have a local LGBT center, it's really helpful to talk to other parents. You need people to talk to you are like you and are on a similar journey. That's really important."
  – Identifies as a straight mother, two children, one non-binary child, Green Bay

- "UW-Green Bay has a Pride camp once a week every summer, one for middle and one for high school, so they can get together with other kids." **– Identifies as a non-binary parent, one child, Green Bay**

- "The one thing I haven't been able to find is a church so that both of us could attend, and they would be accepting of who [my child] is." **– Identifies as a straight mother, one transgender child, Kenosha**

RECOMMENDATIONS

LGBTQ+ Families

LGBTQ+ Parents and Parents of LGBTQ+ Youth

1. Fund LGBTQ+ led efforts.

This includes providing infrastructure funding to build the foundational capacity of organizations to support LGBTQ+ families and removing structural barriers to non-traditional LGBTQ+ groups accessing funding for the critical role they play in improving the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ families. (Individual Children Services, Individual Parent Services, Family Unit Services, Community and Environment Resources)

RELATED KEY FINDING(S): LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY POWER

- Parents reported the most helpful resources come from resilient LGBTQ communities, LGBTQ-led efforts, and peer families. They also reported that these programs and infrastructures are are often unrecognized, unfunded, or unsupported with traditional public funding.
- LGBTQ+ parents and community groups are already doing the work of supporting LGBTQ+ families.
- Many are loosely organized without infrastructure and need fundamental backbone support to be able to access traditional grant resources and scale efforts.
- Types of Efforts to Support: LGBTQ+ Peer Support Groups, LGBT+ Community Centers or Organizations, School GSAs, youth-led events and organizations, LGBTQ+ Pride events/programs, and online resources.

2. Funding should focus on primary prevention strategies including policy and systems change efforts to dismantle barriers hurting LGBTQ+ families.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S): COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

- Parents exposed how deep systemic homophobia and transphobia across public policies underlie the health of LGBTQ+ families.
- The LGBTQ+ community has historically demonstrated its power through advocacy.

- Funding decisions should prioritize funding LGBTQ+ led, community-based efforts to identify, organize, and implement systems and policy changes across local and state public systems.

3. Existing public systems including childcare, schools, healthcare should become LGBTQ+ inclusive.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S): COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

- Parents detailed examples of how public systems (childcare, schools, healthcare, housing, treatment) continue to fail LGBTQ+ families they intend to help.
- Every system funded with public resources should ensure their processes and outcomes are equitable and inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community.

4. LGBTQ+ families need funding to grow accessibility of LGBTQ+ led and LGBTQ+ competent mental health services.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- Parents identified trauma as a common threat to children's health in LGBTQ+ families.
- Many families described how LGBTQ+ competent therapy was a life-saving resources in the early life cycle of an LGTBQ+ child, and specifically a transgender child.

5. Target resources differently for subgroups of LGBTQ+ families.

RELATED KEY FINDING(S):

- The diversity of LGBTQ+ parents and parents of LGBTQ+ youth demonstrated how LGBTQ+ families should not be treated as one group, but instead many subgroups with specific needs.
- Priority subgroups include: 1) transgender and gender non-conforming children, 2) LGBTQ+ parents, 3) Black and Brown LGBTQ+ families, 4) Rural families.
- Additionally, LGBTQ+ children without parental support or who are experiencing homelessness require special care and attention because of their lack of access to traditional parental supports and LGBTQ+ community supports.

CONCLUSIONS

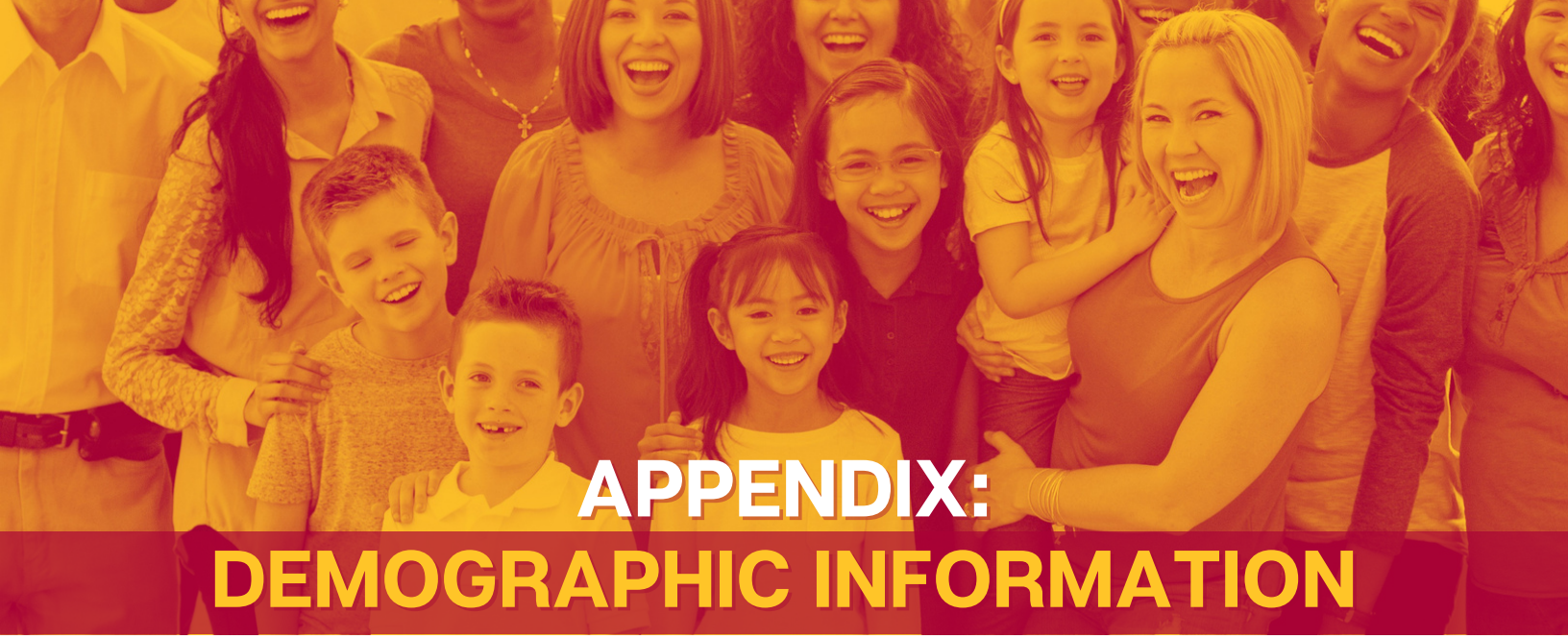
...families are surviving, but very few of those whom we spoke with are thriving.

Wisconsin's children and families are resilient and have endured a significant amount of stress and trauma, especially over the past two years– the global COVID pandemic, community violence, food insecurities, social injustices, homophobia, and unmet needs involving behavioral health care, mental health care, housing, employment, child care, substance addiction treatment, and much more.

Despite these adversities, families are surviving, but very few of those whom we spoke with are thriving. While many of the findings that were gleaned from our research point to the need for systemic and policy change at all levels of government and society, there is also much that can be done at the community level to support families so that all Wisconsin children grow up in safe, stable and nurturing families and environments. Systemic and policy change is needed, as detailed in our final report.

A few programs to be supported at the community level might include parent cafes, healing and learning circles to address race relations and racism, mindfulness space for parents to decompress, retreats for couples, single parents and families, parent-led networking groups, programming for teens that don't necessarily involve sports and LGBTQ+ -led programs and services.

Space and networking opportunities for parents of children with special needs and parents from historically disenfranchised groups, should be funded. Holistic programs and services that treat the entire family, help to prevent relapse and help to prevent parents from losing their children are needed across the state, including the reservations. Finally, Native-American led programs and services to help families relocating to and from the reservation should be funded. These programs could provide culturally responsive support relative to employment, housing and social connectedness for Native Americans.



APPENDIX: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Figure 1

Total Number of Participants: 64

% LGBTQ+ Families 17.19% (11)

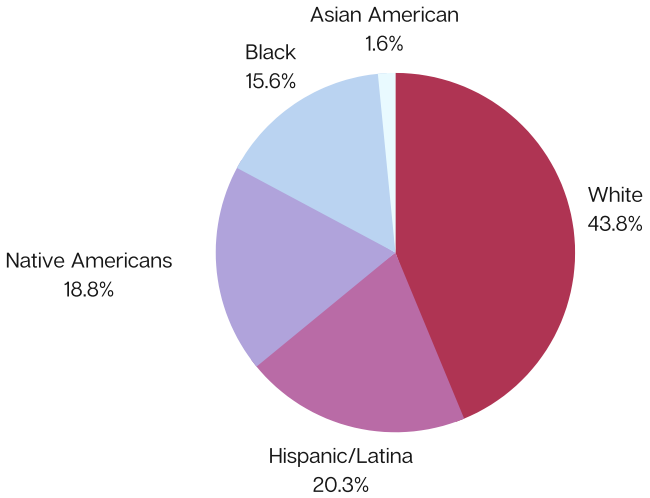


Table 1

Demographics by Listening Session

RACE/ETHNICITY/LGBTQ	GROUP	TOTAL
Black (2), Latina (1), White (3)	Northern & Southeastern	6
Black (1), Asian American (1)	Southern	3
White, (3.3)	Western	3
Black (6), Latina (1), White (4)	Southeastern	11
White	Northeastern	7
Hispanic/Latina	Hispanic/Latina	11
Native American	Native American	12
LGBTQ+White	LGBTQ+White	11
		64